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1970/07/20

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

TOP SECRET-SENSITIVE

July 20, 1970

Mr. President:

Attached is a paper on alternate Vietnam negotiating strategies which I think you will want to read before tomorrow's NSC meeting.

The items in the book which you should read prior to the meeting include my covering memorandum to you which covers the issues and the talking paper which follows this memorandum.

Henry A. Kissinger

TOP SECRET-SENSITIVE

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Furthermore, a ceasefire, under proper conditions, could result in a satisfactory political outcome in South Vietnam.

By early next spring, we may well have to choose definitively between the paths of negotiated settlement and unilateral disengagement. We will be in a much sounder position to do so then than we are now. Not only would a September initiative along the above lines help keep your two options open, but the reactions to it would help you decide which one you should eventually choose.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES

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-- During the next six months we will see whether we can resurrect the private talks with Le Duc Tho and whether they can produce significant results;

-- Our studies project significant pacification gains for the coming months. We will be able to judge whether these gains will provide us with a cushion for the withdrawal of very substantial additional forces.

Throughout the month of August, we can reasonably take the position that Ambassador Bruce is exploring the situation in Paris.

In early September, barring unforeseen developments the next few weeks, I think you should consider making a speech calling for an Indochina Conference -- and include high on the agenda the subject of ceasefire and the exchange of prisoners. You could make clear that such a conference was needed because of the inseparability of the problems in the three countries, but that the established Paris talks on Vietnam would continue (at least until a broader conference was a going concern).

Such an initiative would not commit you to either of the two courses of negotiated settlement or unilateral disengagement. Indeed it should:

-- help provide you enough time to explore and weigh which of these two routes you might wish to take;

-- keep the diplomatic initiative in our hands without making actual substantive concessions;

-- reap whatever propaganda dividends there are to be gained;

-- launch discussions on ceasefire, a subject which Hanoi has resisted and Thieu has found increasingly attractive. Furthermore, a ceasefire, under proper conditions, could result in a satisfactory political outcome in South Vietnam.

By early next spring, we may well have to choose definitively between the paths of negotiated settlement and unilateral disengagement. We will be in a much sounder position to do so then than we are now. Not only would a September initiative along the above lines help keep your two options open, but the reactions to it would help you decide which one you should eventually choose.

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